

gave a moment ago. In justifying LB 976, she indicated we were trying to protect children. Although we couldn't do all of the job, we were making a particular effort where they congregate. She pointed out that, for example, penalties have varied. For example, arson in an open field has a lesser penalty than arson in an occupied building. And my response to that is this, yes, we should protect children where they congregate but we should protect the solitary child as well. The child who happens to be on their own in a location outside one of these zones should have the same protection of the law as the child who is in one of these areas that is congregating. While it is true that there may be a difference in the criminal penalty for arson in an open field and arson in an occupied building, that is with good reason because the occupied building has a human life in it as opposed to the open field. Now, would we countenance the notion that arson in an occupied building with one person had one penalty but three people the penalty would be higher, and five people the penalty would be higher still, as if in aggregating the number of people, you are aggregating the heinousness of placing any human life at risk. Senator Pirsch asks us to send a message and the message of the Johnson amendment is this, and that is why it is the more important of the two messages. The message of the Johnson amendment is every child is precious, every child is equally precious, no matter where they are, no matter what shadow of what building they happen to be standing in, no matter where they are located in this state, every child is equally precious and to subvert any of them to a drug addiction is equally as heinous and should be (interruption) punished.

SPEAKER BARRETT: One minute.

SENATOR LANDIS: The message of the Pirsch bill, however, is that it is more heinous in some locations than others to entice children to drug usage. Of those two messages I think the far more critical one and the better public policy is that every child, no matter where they are located, is under the equal protection of the law and to subvert their will and to entice them into an addiction is a heinous act no matter where it occurs, no matter how many there are. No matter whether they are congregating or individual, it is the fact that they are young that makes them precious and that they are all entitled to be defended by an equal criminal penalty for the subverting whether they are as one or six or ten of them congregating at the moment.